DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 302 SO 012 506

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TITLE The Democratization of Anthropology: Anthropology in the Community College.
PUB DATE Nov 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (Cincinnati, OH, November 1979). Not available from EDRS in paper copy due to light print type.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Anthropology; Attitude Change; *Community Colleges; Community Involvement; *Educational Needs; Educational Objectives; *Educational Trends; Faculty Development; Higher Education; Intellectual Disciplines; *Program Development; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Trends in anthropology education at the community college level are examined with particular regard to current problems, relationship to the anthropology profession, objectives, anthropology's uncertainty of focus, and predictions of future developments. The objective is to point out to anthropologists and other interested people how community colleges can help disseminate knowledge about anthropology's purposes and activities. Until recently, community college anthropology has been considered a marginal arm of the discipline, community college teachers have had only a tenuous claim to professional status, and the American Anthropological Association has indicated no interest in formal affiliation. Currently, however, community colleges are staffed by teachers (PhDs as well as MAs) who are attempting to defend their role as professionals and alert the discipline to the merits and potential of anthropology in the community colleges. Specific ways in which anthropologists in community colleges can contribute to a better understanding of the discipline include emphasizing teaching the basic tenets of anthropology to a student population which crosscuts all sectors of the local community, articulating broad concepts instead of specific research interests, developing courses to reflect a wide range of student capabilities, stressing anthropology's relevance to contemporary society, stimulating communication with other anthropologists, and participating as observers and/or consultants in local, national, and international affairs. (DB)

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Paper Presented at the
American Anthropological Association Meetings
Cincinnati, Ohio, November, 1979

THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF ANTHROPOLOGY: ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF ANTHROPOLOGY: ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Stephen Clapham and Richard H. Furlow

Community college anthropology has been of little interest to professional "establishment" in anthropology. Indeed, for most of the profession, anthropology in the community colleges seems to represent a marginal arm of the discipline and those who teach there seem to be a marginal group, whose claim to professional status is tenuous, given the community colleges' concentration on teaching and their neglect of research. Until quite recently it could also be argued that instruction was usually by "nonprofessionals" as it was being conducted predominantly by MAs who had not undertaken the extended fieldwork required for the doctorate. Today, it is clear that community colleges are staffing with PhDs as well as MAs as the demand for positions at four-year schools outstrips supply.

The American Anthropological Association has little or no formal affiliations with community college anthropology and the programs at community colleges are omitted from inclusion in the Association's Guide to Departments.[2] What little information members of the Association have received about anthropology in junior colleges has mostly been in letters to the Anthropology Newsletter from community college anthropologists attempting to defend their role as professionals and alert the discipline to the merits and potential of anthropology at the community college. This paper constitutes an additional effort in this direction.

Disinterest in community college activities on thepart of what we

choose to term 'establishment anthropology' appears to us symptomatic of the discipline's traditional insularity and intellectual elitism. Within those societies in which it was first engendered, anthropology has remained detached from the mainstream of public knowledge and public interest. With a few notable exceptions, very little has been done by professional anthropologists to circulate the anthropological message to the non-specialist. As a result, the layperson finds it difficult to understand the discipline's purpose and activities. Anthropology for the general public is thus perceived with more or less the same veil of ignorance and disinterest that much of the profession has manifested toward the practice of anthropology at community colleges.[3] Neither of these perspectives auger well for the future of the discipline. Both perspectives stem from elitist posture of establishment anthropology, a posture which has blunted the potential power of anthropology as an intellectual force in today's world and left the discipline for the main part a quiet backwater within academia.

We believe the community college can become anthropology's "front line" for disemination of knowledge to a more general audience than ever before.[4] It is in the community college setting, with its clear emphasis on teaching, and with a student population which crosscuts all sectors of the local community, that anthropology can be presented to greater numbers than in the past. Furthermore, community college anthropology offers a golden opportunity to rebuild, reintegrate, and revitalize the discipline, rendering it much greater currency in the public mind.

Not all community colleges are engaged in these sorts of endeavors, nor can be expected to initiate such efforts. Many community colleges do not have anthropology programs and those that do, let us concede, are sometimes superficial and makeshift, perhaps being taught by someone outside the field.

Indeed, whereas the difficulties of understanding the latter areas lie in the very specificity of information in the field, the difficulty with anthropology has often been its generaltiy. The fragmentation of research interests continues to grow and undermines maintenance of an integrated discipline. This trend was underscored in the words of an incoming President of the American Anthropological Association early in 1979 when he noted that anthropology is "obviously in a phase of growth in which forces toward intellectual and organizational cohesion are lagging as specialization speeds up" (Bohannan 1979:1). If the conceptual unity of the discipline is equivocal for practioners, it goes without saying that the non-specialist is left perplexed trying to put together the pieces in a meaningful manner.

The centrifugal growth tendency of anthropology has been matched by poor definition of the discipline's central concept, culture, which theoretically should serve as a unifying motif but which has been, in its myriad interpretations, a confirmation of anthropology's own uncertainties of focus. Were it to be true that "culture" and anthropology could only be comprehended and appreciated through the fieldwork experience, the prospects for the future must be guarded as world society increasingly reflects the main features of our own culture and opportunities to experience the exotic in situ dry up fast.

To return to a point made in our introductory remarks, anthropology is not doing a very good public relations job. Except for one or two efforts, very few anthropological principles have circulated out into popular thinking. Ideas such as cultural relativity, which appear to promise so much in terms of ameliorating intercultural disjunctions, fail through poor articulation. In the words of one anthropologist who we partially

release from this criticism: "the solemn strictures of the anthropologist to the layman who might make use of his insights lack the necessary concreteness" (Hall 1959:31).

Summarizing our discussion of the factors intrinsic to the discipline whoch have to be considered, we have noted the fragmentation of research interests, the equivocal image of anthropology in the public mind, and the lack of good articulation of the discipline's principles to the public. We now turn our attention to the institution and attempt to provide brief coverage of its major features as they bear on our general theme.

The Nature of the Institution

As an educational institution, the community college is a relatively recent arrival, appearing during the last two decades to provide university parallel streams for freshmen and sophomores, as well as offering vocational programs and community cultural enrichment opportunities. Beyond these general objectives, the academic ambience and general intellectual environment of the community college is a variable influenced strongly by the policies and postures of those who decide hiring procedures, curriculum, and overall college goals. The community colleges are the vanguard of the democratic higher educational system in society. They are frequently "open door" in their admittance policy; everyone gets a chance at a higher education, often more than one chance.

As a result of open admissions, the level of instruction at community colleges must,to be successful, reflect a wide range of student capabilities. Community colleges tend to be utilized by minorities that otherwise would probably not enter higher education. Housewives and retirees consitute other population groups that patronize the community college system, providing considerable diversity of age and backgrounds. To be productive, instruction has to grapple with these givens. Subject matter, and the way it is articulated, has to be given careful consideration if the learning process

is to be meaningful for this diverse audience. We need hardly emphasize that in the case of anthropology we are already assuming difficulties of articulation based on the points raised earlier in this paper.

These summary observations concerning the nature of the discipline and the nature of the institution allow us to suggest now the manner in which the two come together. In general, we believe, the anthropology accomodates to the institution, which in this case respresents an accomodation to the principles of a democratic educational system. Anthropology, traditionally elitist, becomes itself more democratic in the sense that its pronouncements are now more available for common consumption. But to be viable in these circumstances anthropology at the community college cannot afford to continue the aforenoted failure of the discipline to clarify its public image, promote its relevance to our own society, and above all explain its ideas in straightforward language. The very survival of anthropology within the community college depends very often on accomplishing these reforms. The community college is the medium through which the anthropological message undergoes modification to render it palatable for the general population. This process of modification and the resultant expansion of anthropology's advocates well beyond the professional segment, might well be called the democratization of anthropology. We conclude this paper by providing some examples of the process at work.

At last year's Meetings in Los Angeles, approximately 40 community college anthropologists met and formed the Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges (SACC). The relevant purposes for this paper of SACC as stated in the Constitution are as follows: 1. To stimulate communication among anthropologists and teachers of anthropology in community colleges; 2. To stimulate instructional, curriculum, and program development in the community colleges and to aid in

the improvement of teaching; 3. To act as a liason with other professional organizations and offices, universities, and the local community; and, lastly, 4. To share with the general public the meanings and uses of anthropology. As you can see, we are stressing undergraduate teaching improvement and community involvement--traditionally, two areas of major interest to all community colleges, and we should hope, to four year colleges and universities as well. But apparently, this is not the case as can be seen from the following letter sent to a colleague in response to a request asking for names of individuals at his college who might be interested in membership in SACC. All the colleges contacted belong to the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) and are listed in their 1979 "Directory of Community, Junior and Technical Colleges".

> You have mistakenly identified our system as one composed of community colleges. We have nothing in common with community colleges, your assumptions to the contrary not withstanding. Thus, any department member, regardless of his location at any one of fourteen campuses scattered throughout the state, would be most unlikely to be interested in your organization.

This indicates the sort of elitism that we have earlier discussed. As is the case with all stratification systems, it is the people within the lower strata who tend to be most concerned with making boundary lines between themselves and those they perceive as being below them.

In 1977, the Broward Community College Anthropological Society was formed. From the beginning it was felt that the Society should include in its membership people from the community as well as interested students and faculty at BCC. One reason was that we are a community college and also that in previous years a student only club had been tried and it had failed miserably, not even getting off the ground. As it turned out it was a wise decision to include the community because from the beginning the community has been the mainstay. The first meeting had about 50 people in attendance and there was discussion

after the meeting between graduate students at a nearby university and the club sponsors concerning the kinds of programs that should be given. The graduate student position was that the club should be "professional", i.e., not give programs that were nontheoretical in nature. Our position was that programs should be presented that would appeal not only to students of anthropology but also to people in the community interested in the field, but not professionally. We think that this has been achieved, although not to the satisfaction of the graduate students, since they no longer attend club meetings.

In September, 1978, we started a lecture series entitled "Origins of Man and the Cosmos", a twelve part series which ended last May with Walter Goldschmidt's presentation on the "Origins of the Future". This series was funded by the Florida Endowment for the Humanities and BCC. The series attracted an audience averaging about 250-300 persons (150-450 range), persons made up of a few students and faculty from BCC and other colleges in the area, but primarily the audience consisted of people from the community. The School Board of Broward County also gave in-service credit for attendance, so we had a few public school teachers in the audience. The series has received great acclaim not only in the immediate area but also throughout the country. The BCC administration from the president down to the division level gave tremendous backing in this endeavor.

Another way in which the general community is encouraged to discover the anthropological perspective is through our summer field school in anthropology, which has been held in Merida, Yucatan, over the past three summers. We use methods developed by James Spradley to teach students data collecting by either participant observation or interviewing, depending on whether the student speaks Spanish. The students who have taken these courses have ranged in age from 16 to 77 but the majority are around 30 years of age, since the majority are Broward County school teachers wanting the 6 semester hour course for State recertification.

The out of country portion of the field course is four weeks and costs around $300. In past years students have collected material and written ethnographies on swimming pool behavior, selling in the market, parent-child relationships in the Zocalo, and hammock selling, among others. This program has been quite successful and we think it will continue in the future.

Other community colleges across the nation have similar programs to incorporate the community and hopefully teach them a little about the anthropological perspective. Many have active museum programs and programs to show anthropological films; others have active archaeological programs, not only for students but also for members from the community. On educational TV, programs concerning cultural anthropology are conceived and produced by anthropologists at community colleges. We believe such programs are necessary if anthropology is going to survive and have the influence it should have in today's world.[5]

In this section we have shown a few examples of how anthropology in the community college setting has reached out to the larger community and we have examined the manner in which the discipline of anthropology undergoes a kind of intellectual 're-tooling' as it is introduced into the community college setting. We have argued that anthropology adjusts to meet the realities of operating within the community college largely by attempting to mitigate or remove some of the traditional deficiencies the discipline has manifested. Low public profile, poor articulation of objectives, and lack of an integrated image are major obstacles to program success in the community college and thus it is largely at the community colleges that efforts appear centered on rendering anthropology more appealing and relevant to the general lay population.

We conclude that anthropology is democratized at the community college and may finally be approaching satisfaction of the discipline's original rationale;

we study other cultures so as to better understand our own. Only Margaret Mead consistently persisted in maintaining that traditional stance and communicating it to the wider society. Her loss leaves a void between the practioners and the public, a void which community colleges may be seen to have the potential to alleviate.

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Footnotes

1. We want to thank David Abrams, H. Leon Abrams Jr., Neil Crispo, Walter Goldschmidt, Marvin Harris, Evelyn Montgomery, Winfred Steglich, and Philip Stein for reading and making comments on the preliminary draft of this paper.
2. Several years ago a community college anthropologist from California wrote the AAA suggesting that community college anthropologists be listed in the Guide. He never even received a reply from the Association. (Philip L. Stein, personal communication)
3. In the absence of anthropologists talking out on the issues of interest to the general public, the void has been filled by popularized pseudo-anthropology from the Primal Man television series, Richard Leakey's books and lectures, to Chariot of the Gods! Many students view such presentations as representing the mainstream of Anthropology.
4. In the Fall of 1979, 11,354,756 students were enrolled in American colleges and universities. Of these, 4,083,151 or 36.0% were enrolled in two year colleges. In California this figure is 63.6%. (National Center for Educational Statistics, December, 1979)
5. One important way in which anthropology can be brought into public focus is for anthropologists to become more involved in national and international affairs. It is interesting to note that during the Jonestown crisis psychologists, sociologists, historians, lawyers, etc., were interviewed on TV and radio, but no anthropologists. Yet many anthropologists are specialists on cults. One exception was Marvin Harris, who did have an article about cults in the New York Times.